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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a program to provide educational and employment services to high school dropouts and unemployed adults in seven rural Tennessee counties. The program offers supplemental services and coordinates job development and placement with Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) administrative personnel. Program activities include basic education, life skills and motivational training, and pre-employment training. The program staff recruits participants by establishing contacts with community organizations and institutions that serve the target population. Upon acceptance into the program, each participant's education needs are assessed. Students then receive General Educational Development (GED) tests or pre-GED instruction appropriate to their remediation needs. The life skills training component includes education in community resources, consumer affairs, government and law, health and safety, and occupational knowledge. Participants who move into training related employment are eligible for 90 days of post-placement services. Of 137 participants enrolled, 41 attempted the GED test and 36 passed. A total of 54 participants were employed in the seven-county area, and employers were generally pleased with the participants' performance on the job. (DHP)

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# EDUCATION AND PLACEMENT PROGRAM FOR AT-RISK RURAL ADULTS

## INTRODUCTION

The University of Tennessee operates multi-purpose educational programs in Service Delivery Area 4, Tennessee. The programs are located in four rural communities serving at-risk adults in Anderson, Blount, Campbell, Cumberland, Loudon, Morgan, and Roane counties. The program offers supplemental services to participants not presently being served or who do not qualify for program activities. The program coordinates training and educational activities with ongoing Job Training Partnership Act administrative offices and other program operations. Referral/partnership agreements are arranged for those participants who need to complete their GED or to obtain private-sector employment.

## PURPOSE

The purpose of the program is to provide educational and employment services to a large percentage of high school dropouts and unemployed individuals. The program is designed to offer supplemental services and coordinate job development and placement with JTPA administrative personnel. Specific objectives of the program are:

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1. to enroll participants who are economically disadvantaged high school dropouts,
2. to provide information that will assist the participant in selecting a realistic career goal,
3. to conduct individual and group counseling in order to develop life coping skills,
4. to teach pre-GED/GED classes that will enable participants to transfer into the primary labor force,
5. to teach employment, communication, comprehension, and computational skills needed to enter the labor market,
6. to teach proper interview techniques,

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7. to develop realistic job opportunities and transferable employability skills,

8. to place participants using private sector employment opportunities, and

9. to conduct post-placement follow-up activities to ensure job retention.

RELEVANCE

Program activities include basic education, life skills and motivational training, and pre-employment training. The program serves youth and adults who need educational assistance, individuals who have already dropped out of high school, welfare and other recipients or government assistance, and displaced homemakers. The program is structured and designed to help remove barriers to employment commonly experienced by this group. These barriers include low self-esteem, poor academic skills, lack of knowledge about the world of work, and the lack of essential job-seeking and retention skills. The instructional format is competency based which leads participants to attain specific education, employment and similar skills in order to function successfully in society.

Reaching individuals in rural areas can be more difficult than trying to develop a program for their large city counterparts. Not only do resources tend to be limited, but geographic areas are larger and populations are smaller. As a result, many service providers are needed in rural areas because there are generally fewer sources of help.

Those who are academically deficient usually have higher unemployment rates, longer periods of unemployment, and lower wages when they do find work. Often they leave school because of an unhappy experience (low self-esteem, poor academic performance, family difficulties or impending parenthood). Circumstances such as these make finding and keeping a job nearly impossible. Many have little or no work experience and lack essential job-finding skills. The ability to understand and respond to a "classified ad", to schedule and complete an interview, or to fill out an application form are difficult and almost impossible tasks. If one does become employed, he or she may not possess the essential work habits such as punctuality, neatness, and politeness needed to retain and succeed on the job.

## RECRUITMENT AND ASSESSMENT

The program staff recruits participants by establishing contacts with community organizations and institutions that serve the target population. The purpose of these contacts is to inform the community about the establishment of the program, to build relationships, and to discuss and negotiate agreements for referrals and resource exchanges. Examples of organizations that are contacted include public high schools, government assistance offices, and community-based organizations. Contacts are made through business visits, telephone calls, group presentations and mass mailings.

An assessment of each participant's educational personal needs is conducted upon his or her acceptance into the program. The purpose of the assessment is to obtain information about the participant's vocational, academic, and motivational strengths and weaknesses in order to design an appropriate individualized plan for each person. Formal and standardized tests are administered to determine academic levels. A job readiness assessment test and an untimed multiple choice examination are used to measure each participant's understanding of the "work a day" world.

## GENERAL EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT (GED) INSTRUCTION

Participants for the program of at-risk rural adults usually require remedial instruction to improve their skills. Some participants with low academic skills require basic skills on pre-GED instruction. Others with higher academic skill need instruction which prepares them to receive the GED diploma. Whatever the academic skills are upon entry into the program, participants receive instruction that is designed to meet their individual needs. Instruction is developed and presented in a way to increase the likelihood of success in the program which will increase the possibility of success in the private sector.

The state of Tennessee began administering the 1988 edition of the GED examination on September 1, 1988. Test items on this edition are classified according to Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives. Items on the test focus on use rather than merely the recitation of knowledge and information. Mere recall of information is not measured. Instead the test includes items that require a higher level of cognitive skills. The program utilizes a well designed competency based curriculum applicable to the new GED test. Pre and post tests are administered to determine competency in each instructional area.

## PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRAINING (PET)

The PET segment is the foundation and essential portion of the program. Many participants have never been employed by private sector employers; therefore, they are unaware of the initial requirement needed for entry level employment. Others have been employed but have been unable to hold a position due to poor work habits or lack of basic job skills.

PET is largely preparation for entry into the labor market. Content of the curriculum consists of completing job applications identifying job openings, developing interviewing techniques, personality development and work adjustment which includes grooming, punctuality, attendance, seeking help, accepting supervision and problem solving. Techniques utilized in PET are group discussions, role playing, simulated interviews, outside speakers and field observations.

The ultimate results of PET are to have participants understand the hiring process from the employer's perspective and to understand realistic job options available to them. Such understanding will facilitate an appropriate and useful job placement for both the participant and the employer.

The program also includes life skills training as part of the educational component. This training complements academic and pre-employment instructions by insuring that participants master necessary skills needed in every day living situations such as:

1. community resources,
2. consumer affairs,
3. government and law,
4. health and safety,
5. occupational knowledge (follow-up to PET),

## PLACEMENT AND FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

The prevailing goal of the program is to provide pre-employment training leading to private sector placements. Unsubsidized employment is achieved through private sector employment.

Overcoming employers' resistance to employment of high school dropouts is a primary objective of the staff. Most employers prefer hiring high school graduates. The specific objectives of private sector placement activities can

eliminate barriers to employments such as:

1. attitudes and values: High school dropouts frequently have poor self-images or distorted work values and an absence of salable skills.

2. lack of job skills: The employer may view lack of skills and exit from high school as evidence that the participant will not perform well on the job.

3. stereotypes of the high school dropout: Considerable resistance to the employment of high school dropouts stems from stereotypes about their motivation, attitudes, and behaviors.

4. transportation: A significant problem for high school dropouts is getting to work. Special arrangements are made and assistance is given to insure that participants transportation needs are met.

Another aspect of the program is that participants are given extensive follow-up services after placement by the staff. Private sector placement activities do not stop after the participant is placed. If the employment situation of the at-risk rural adult is to be stabilized, a system of post-placement activities will serve both the employer and the participant. Survival on the job can be enhanced with post-placement procedures of visiting the job site and working with the participants and their immediate supervisor on problems that exist or may emerge. It is the role of the staff to recognize difficulties encountered on the job and to reverse the negative behavior into positive learning experiences.

Participants who are terminated into training related employment will be eligible to receive ninety (90) days of post-placement services following termination from the program. This will allow participants to remain in educational instruction in order to complete GED preparation.

EMPLOYER PARTICIPATION

The University of Tennessee Education and Training Program is designed to provide supplemental training services and to coordinate job development and placement activities. It is the goal of the program to develop participants to be motivated, dependable, honest, neat and good workers in order to be employed to fill job openings. The staff screens and assesses participants in

order that business, industry, and government in the counties of Anderson, Blount, Campbell, Cumberland, Loudon, Morgan, and Roane can offer employment.

Participants are employed in occupational areas such as building services, construction, health care, hospitality/restaurant, industrial trades, manufacturing/ production, office/clerical, and retail/wholesale. Both staff and employers cooperate together in the placement of participants in a position where they will have the opportunity to be successful in the private sector.

PROGRAM ACCOMPLISHMENTS

A total of 137 participants were enrolled in the four programs as of November 30, 1988 (Table I). Forty-two were enrolled in Blount County, 50 enrolled in Crossville, 29 enrolled in LaFollette and 16 enrolled in Oliver Springs. A total of 45 participants were in basic skills instruction. Ninety-two were enrolled in GED instruction; 32 in Blount County, 37 in Crossville, 15 in LaFollette, and 8 in Oliver Springs. A total of 41 in the four programs attempted the GED test and 36 achieved the competency level.

A total of 54 participants were employed in the seven county area. Most of the participants were placed in the vicinity of the four communities previously mentioned. Employers were generally pleased with the participants performance on the job. As the positive image of the program grows in the business community more successful placements will be made.

The percent of the agreed upon goals by the program director and the funding agency was achieved. Since the four satellite program just began in January 1988, realistic goals were established. Private Industry Council (PIC) and the administration are pleased with the overall success of the multi-phased community program for at-risk rural adults.

TABLE I

BLOUNT COUNTY, CROSSVILLE, LAFOLLETTE, OLIVER SPRINGS
CUMULATIVE PROGRAM ACTIVITY REPORT
JULY TO NOVEMBER, 1988

| PROGRAM | TOTAL ENROLLED | BASIC SKILLS | GED | ATTEMPT GED | PASSED GED | PASSING GED | EMPLOYED |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Blount County | 42 | 10 | 32 | 15 | 14 | 93% | 25 |
| Crossville | 50 | 13 | 37 | 17 | 16 | 94% | 15 |
| LaFollette | 29 | 14 | 15 | 6 | 4 | 67% | 7 |
| Oliver Springs | 16 | 8 | 8 | 3 | 2 | 67% | 7 |
| TOTAL | 137 | 45 | 92 | 41 | 36 | 90% | 54 |